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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a description of the development of an honors program at Gulf Coast Community College (GCCC). The description is organized around three flow charts corresponding to different stages in the program's development, and which are followed by more detailed explanations. The first flow chart deals with program planning and development from inception to implementation. In this stage, an initiator perceived the need for an honors program and saw that a formal start was made. Subsequent steps included the selection of a project director, attendance at a regional honors conference, the selection of an honors committee, the establishment of a timetable for program implementation, and the articulation of the program's philosophy and objectives. The institution then moved at its own pace to smoothly and effectively assimilate the new honors programs to the existing curriculum. The second flow chart addresses the selection of faculty and students to participate in the program. Some factors considered in faculty selection were the instructors' enthusiasm for the subject matter, and the clarity of their course objectives, requirements and grading procedures. Honors student recruitment activities were developed to coincide with GCCC's marketing activities, and a battery of tests was chosen for honors applicants. The final flow chart presents the course design and sequence for GCCC honors students. After a mandatory, one-semester honors symposium, each participant must take at least one honors course from each of the following divisions: Psychology or Political Science; Understanding Art, Freshman Chemistry, or Zoology; Literature; and one course in the student's major or a computer language. (JMC)

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HONORS:

GETTING STARTED

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Honors: Getting Started

Initiating an honors program for an institution is a formidable project under the best of circumstances. For someone unfamiliar with honors programs, just deciding where to start within the somewhat nebulous concept of honors is a real problem. What sequence of activities, what time-frame, what program structure, who knows, and where's help are common first questions.

The following is an outline generated by one small community college which planned for and established its honors program. The outline is given in a series of flow charts which are discussed in some detail. The charts are pictorial representations of goals which were set, changed, and met as the program progressed. Chart I deals with program planning and development from inception to implementation. Chart II addresses the participant aspect, including recruitment, course preparation, and academic recognition. Chart III addresses the unique course design/sequence for this college.

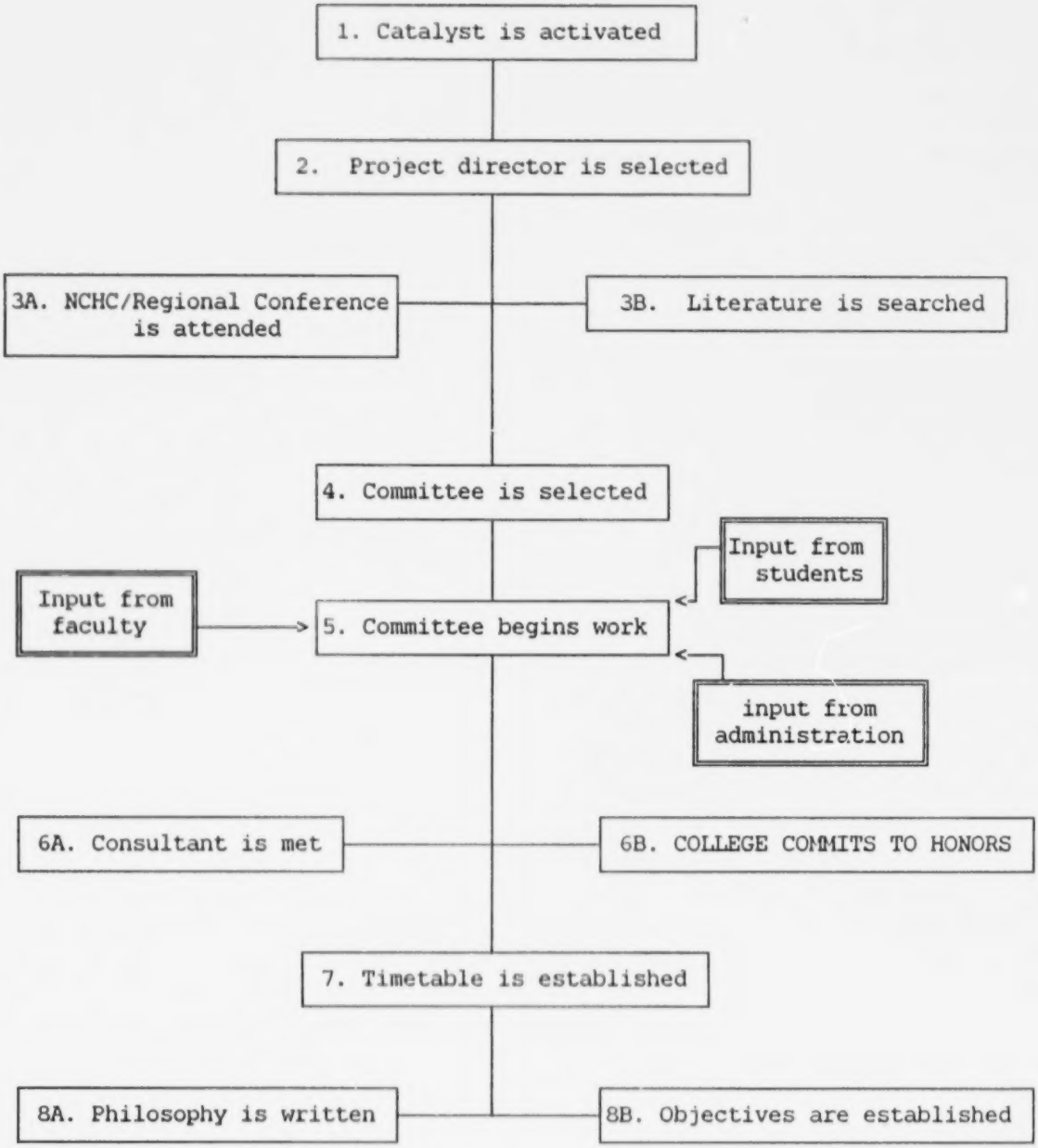

1. Catalyst is activated
2. Project director is selected
3A. NCHC/Regional Conference is attended
3B. Literature is searched
4. Committee is selected
Input from students
Input from faculty
5. Committee begins work
input from administration
6A. Consultant is met
6B. COLLEGE COMMITS TO HONORS
7. Timetable is established
8A. Philosophy is written
8B. Objectives are established

Chart I

1. First, an initiator, a catalyst, both perceived the need for such a program and had the energy or position to see that a formal start was made. At Gulf Coast, the initiator was the academic dean who administered faculty-initiative projects and who asked a faculty member to research the feasibility of honors for the institution.

Although the impact of administrative support cannot be denied, it was not necessary that administration initiate the concept. It was important, however, that the initiator be either significantly supported, both politically and financially or, as in Gulf Coast's case, appropriately placed to bring such support to bear. Undertaking the task of developing a college honors program within a college required crossing several political paths and committing essential funds. Without such strong support from an influential administrator, it is unlikely that the proposal would have flourished.

2. The project director had to possess the energy and commitment to see the project through as well a proven track record at the institution. Someone who knows institutional idiosyncrasies probably makes fewer political errors than someone new to the institution.

The project director at Gulf Coast was a long-time faculty member, given a 20% load reduction for overseeing the project. Funds for travel and supplies were made available from Staff and Program Development monies.

3A. NCHC, the National Collegiate Honors Council, provided "Beginning in Honors" training at its fall conference. This program for representatives of institutions considering an honors program or just beginning in honors was invaluable. The information provided was practical, the discussions were enabling, and the excitement was contagious. The new director was relieved to meet others in similar situations, to view the variety of honors programs already functioning, and to find such a wonderful source of consultants.

Directors or representatives from existing honors programs brought a wide spectrum of information to the national meeting and shared this information through workshops, literature displays, and forums. (If it is it not possible for a new project director to attend the national meeting, he/she may realize the same benefits by attending a regional meeting.) Information concerning regional contacts as well as the national conference is available from the National Collegiate Honors Council, Boise State University, 1910 University Drive, Boise, Idaho, 83725 (phone: 208- 385-1208).

3B. The National Collegiate Honors Council and the League for Innovation in the Community College provide several publications of interest to those developing honors programs. Some of these are as follows:

Honors in the Two-Year College, a publication describing program models, support systems, and faculty, and offering answers to many questions is available from NCHC at the above address.

Honors Programs in Smaller Colleges, also available from NCHC, specifically addresses the unique needs and problems of developing, maintaining, and revamping honors programs in institutions of fewer than 3000 FTE. It addresses the reality that honors in small institutions ise not a reduced versions of honors in a large university.

Handbook for the Evaluation of an Honors Program is also available from the above. Questions raised in this handbook address important issues such as student perception, budget, authority, advising, and many others.

Survey of Honors Programs: A Resource Inventory and Directory, 1984 is available from the League for Innovation in the Community College, 23276 South Points Drive, Suite 103, Laguna Hills, CA 92653.

The Forum for Honors deals with a variety of topics including teaching methods, administration, common problems, association activities, and special topics of interest. It, too, is available from the NCHC.

The National Honors Report is a newsletter publication of NCHC, dealing with timely topics, notices, and comments.

Fostering Academic Excellence Through Honors Programs is a 1986 Jossey-Bass, Inc. publication edited by Paul G. Friedman and Reva C. Jenkins-Freidman which covers a broad spectrum of relevant topics. Advising, curriculum design, seminars, independent study, small schools, and selection of students are a few examples of the issues addressed.

Numerous other publications can help the new director through the phases of program structuring. Probably the best source of information, published or not, was other directors. Forms for everything, syllabi for all kinds of courses, handbooks for students and committees, and recruitment ideas for students and faculty are freely shared among directors and prospective directors. Again, the state, regional, and national offices are invaluable in providing contact opportunities.

4. The Honors Committee was considered to be the professional foundation, the first foothold the program had, and the honors director carefully considered its makeup. Representation from various academic disciplines, student services, and administration brought a breadth of concerns and ideas to the committee. Any individual lacking enthusiasm about honors or a total commitment to the idea was not considered for the committee. Once the committee members had adapted to the honors concept, they became unofficial representatives at deans council, department meetings, and other gatherings where academic and recruiting activities were discussed.

5. The committee was given ample opportunity to read materials gathered by the project chair and to discuss the unique needs of the institution. Because the honors program must fit the institution, the committee felt it would be wise to revisit documents pertinent to institutional direction, for example: the Five Year Plan and similar projections, the institutional philosophy, student demographics, and community resources/development. This was a critical period during which these people became aware of the reality of honors within the institution's resources and divested themselves of impractical or unreasonable proposals.

During this period, the committee gathered information and ideas from concerned campus bodies: students, faculty, and administration. Casual mentionings of "honors" in appropriate, informal gatherings garnered a real feel for the campus attitude toward such a program. As the word spread that honors was being considered, a groundswell of support became apparent, but fortunately, concerned groups did not impose mandates on the committee. Freedom to consider, to suppose, to propose was invaluable, particularly in this phase.

6A. The first consultant was chosen with an eye toward the developmental process rather than the program. This consultant was the ideal person to address the Instructional Affairs Council concerning the need for and impact of honors, the resources required, general recruitment techniques, and other, administrative interests. Actually, this consultant's primary goal was to alleviate concerns about the program's potential success.

This consultant had ample time to meet with the honors committee in general discussion of all phases of honors. Because she had been involved in the initiation of several honors programs, she was very sensitive to the practical as well as philosophical concerns. Not only could she prevent

commission of major and costly errors, but she knew little things like where to look for forms, syllabi, schedules, and the variety of other items the honors committees wanted to see.

6B. By this time the honors committee had studied the concept, concluded that honors was appropriate for the institution, and outlined a vague notion of how honors would fit into the institutional picture. A vote of confidence from the Instructional Affairs Council in the form of Commitment to Honors permitted the concept to move toward reality. Now, the work began in earnest.

7. This institution moves at its own pace in assimilating new programs. A smooth transition required that honors development fit the institution's pace. The committee toyed with the idea of a fall start-up, but development of the time table made it apparent that inception to actual start-up would probably require two years. As a result, the first year was spent in making general, philosophical decisions, the second in practical decisions. Not only was the philosophy determined, the requirements established, the courses selected, the faculty chosen and trained, the courses designed, the "perks" determined, and students recruited, but such mundane tasks as getting courses into schedules and into the catalog, designing and printing forms, training advisors, and setting up an appropriate facility were completed. It would have been difficult to accomplish some of these activities within a calendar year when catalog changes, course approvals, and scheduling require a year's lead time. The committee decided to take its time.

8A. The philosophy was important for a number of reasons. Besides being the governing concept behind honors, it was the first issue about which the committee really interacted in a give-and-take atmosphere as it tried to structure the program's basic principles. The frequency with which the philosophy served as a basis for decision was surprising to some, but those

who have worked in honors for a while are aware of the strength and direction a well-conceived philosophical statement gives the program.

8B. Within the timetable framework were specific objectives to complete as the program moved forward. The plan included such items as faculty selection, catalog changes, brochure mailing, student advising, course order. When the events were sequenced in that spring semester, it reinforced the need for a two year planning period.

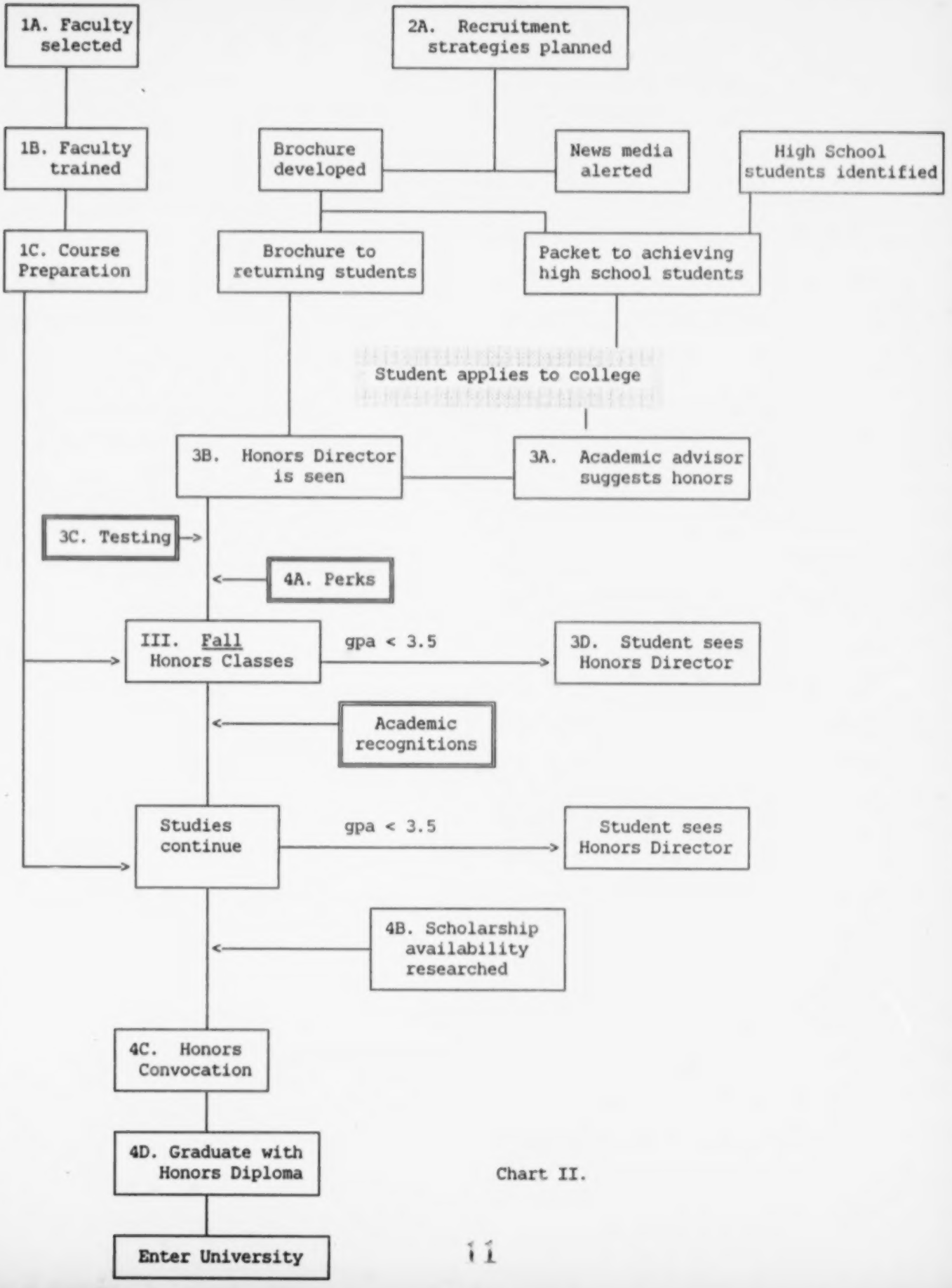

1A. Faculty selected
2A. Recruitment strategies planned
1B. Faculty trained
Brochure developed
News media alerted
High School students identified
1C. Course Preparation
Brochure to returning students
Packet to achieving high school students
Student applies to college
3B. Honors Director is seen
3A. Academic advisor suggests honors
3C. Testing
4A. Perks
III. Fall Honors Classes
gpa < 3.5
3D. Student sees Honors Director
Academic recognitions
Studies continue
gpa < 3.5
Student sees Honors Director
4B. Scholarship availability researched
4C. Honors Convocation
4D. Graduate with Honors Diploma
Enter University

Chart II.

1A. Faculty who designed honors courses and faculty who teach honors courses are not necessarily the same faculty. Those teaching honors courses participated in the course design, but expanding the group involved in course development helped improve honors commitment among campus professionals as those additional people "bought into honors" through their participation. Division chairs and/or division policy selected individuals or groups to design courses. In some cases the Honors Committee made recommendations, but ultimate selection was left to the individual divisions.

Honors faculty selection involved the Honors Director, division chair, and the institution's academic officer. Some factors considered were those evaluation items relating to a) instructor response to student questions, b) instructor's enthusiasm for subject matter, c) students' perception of their own learning, and d) clarity of course objectives, requirements, and grading procedures in instructor's courses. The most popular professors were not necessarily thought to be the best honors professors; thus some objective measures were incorporated in the decision.

1B. Honors students are different. It is this difference that necessitated training honors faculty. A second consultant, director of a successful honors program, proved highly effective as a trainer because this experienced honors instructor could address real aspects of teaching honors students. The concept of honors as a "different delivery system" sounded exciting in principle, but would have been a bit more difficult to implement without practical guidelines and suggestions from an experienced honors instructor. It was felt that thereafter, in-house honors instructors could train new honors faculty.

1C. Honors courses were prepared by individuals or committees as determined by the respective divisions. This procedure seemed to strengthen the

relationship between honors and the academic divisions. Faculty were compensated for course preparation as an overload. If a committee was involved, compensation was divided equally among the committee members.

2A. Recruitment strategies were developed to coincide with marketing activities. As the marketing officer targeted appropriate students, the director visited the designated high school students, maintained a significant level of correspondence with these students, and was constantly available as a mentor/counsellor.

3A. The institution's academic advisors met for a brief training session concerning the general concept of honors and the way honors courses fit the student's academic program. The importance of academic advisors to the success of honors could not be over stressed. It was thought that the academic advisor would be the key to success or failure for the program since this advisor is frequently the first individual contact the new student has with the college.

The academic advisor planned the student's program and provided a course approval card required for registration. The student was then sent to the Honors director for application materials.

3B. In this initial visit with the Honors director, the student and director determined whether honors would be desirable for the student, planned an honors course sequence which best fit the student's needs, and generally discussed the concept. The student was given a limited access card required for admission to honors courses and was sent to registration.

3C. New honors students are required to take a battery of tests including the LEARNING STYLES INVENTORY (computerized perceptual style inventory from Educational Activities, Inc.) and E-LASSI (computerized learning and study

strategies inventory from H & H Enterprises); and they may be required to take PLEASE UNDERSTAND ME (relates to learning style, careers, time management, and test-taking), COPING WITH TESTS (a test anxiety intervention program), and others, if deemed necessary. The testing officer discusses the results and subsequent recommendations with the student and sends a copy of the summary to the honors director.

3D. The honors director closely tracks each honors student, sending out letters of encouragement, arranging conferences when grades are threatened, and providing for recognition opportunities. If the G.P.A. should drop below the 3.0 mark, the student is given one semester to bring the average back to the level required to remain in the program. Counselling, tutoring, testing, and any other assistance available is provided. If, however, the G.P.A. remains below the required level, the student is dropped from the program. Students who maintain the 3.5 G.P.A. required for admission and graduation from the program are commended for their outstanding performance.

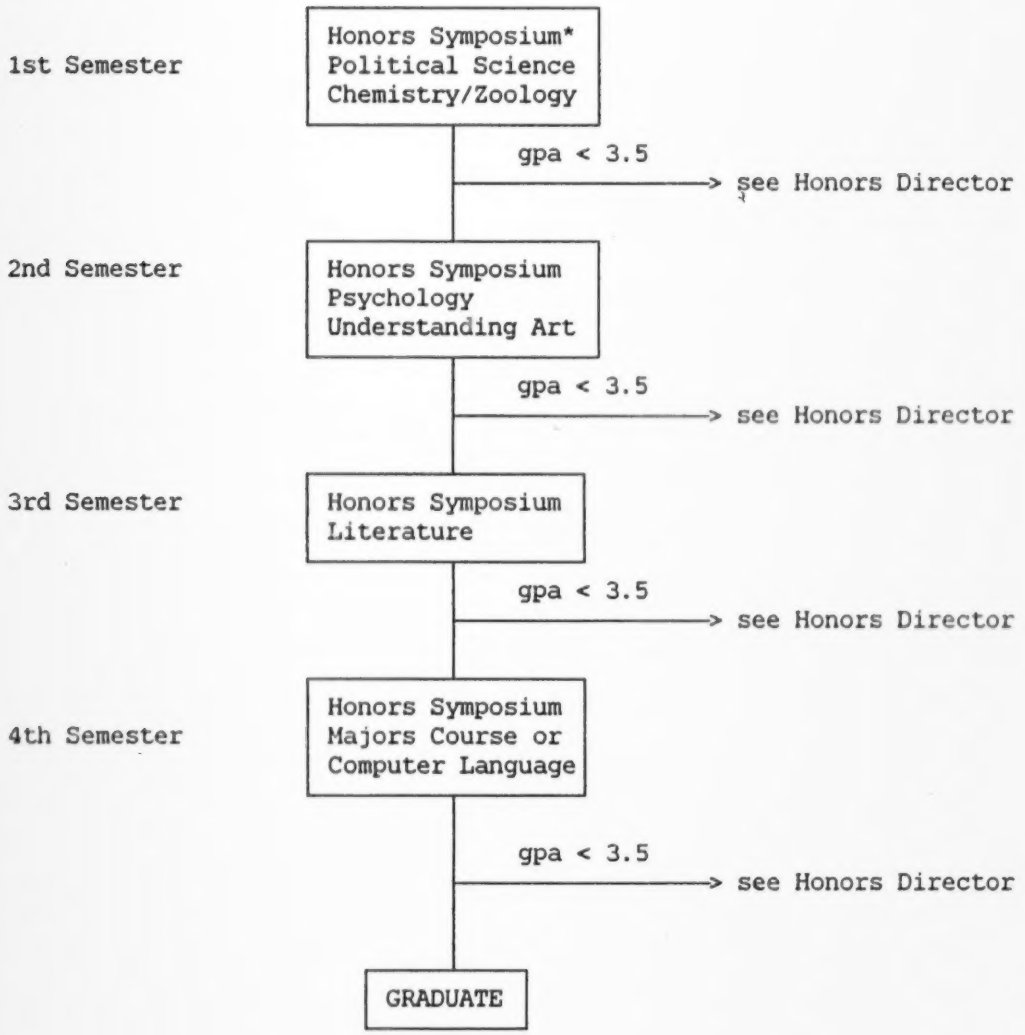
4A. Students frequently ask, "Why should I take honors?" Much of the answer lies in the traditional small class, individual attention, and different delivery system which delineate honors. Added attractive features are the expanded library privileges both at the community college and its closest university neighbor, recognition at academic functions, membership in Phi Theta Kappa, opportunity to participate in the college "Brain Bowl," classes in the honors conference room, tickets to special campus functions, and appropriate designations on documents.

4B. Every effort is made to procure scholarships for students who wish to continue their education at the upper division level. While scholarships within the honors program itself are no problem, each honors student must be assisted in making scholarship application to universities. Through state and

regional affiliations, the honors director is uniquely placed to help graduating students with these applications.

4C. Honors Convocation is being changed to meet the changing needs of the institution. What form it will take is not yet certain, but it is certain that an honors convocation is necessary and desirable.

4D. Students who complete the honors sequence with an overall 3.5 or better gpa are considered graduates of the honors program and have that designation on their transcripts and diploma. Students who participate in a portion of the program or who fail to reach the requisite overall gpa have honors courses indicated on their transcripts, but do not graduate from the program.



*only required for one semester

Chart III

The committee decided that the honors program should fit any college transfer program the institution offered. To achieve this end, the committee removed from honors consideration virtually all courses which could be completed through advanced placement testing, dual enrollment, and CLEP credits from honors consideration. The remaining courses in the general education core were grouped to provide each participant a broad spectrum of course requirements with a variety of delivery systems.

The honors participant is expected to take at least one honors course from each of the following divisions:

I. Honors Symposium (1 sem hr) - This may be taken for more than one semester if the student so desires, but one semester is required.

II. Psychology or Political Science

III. Understanding Art, Freshman Chemistry, or Zoology

IV. Literature

V. Course in major area or computer language

Honors Symposium and Literature are designed to develop critical and creative thinking skills. These two, as well as the psychology and political science, are taught through symposium in a physical setting designed to promote discussion and debate. The art course centers around a major group production, the execution of which promotes the need for a study of form and style, and hence involves development of problem-solving skills. The chemistry stresses problem-solving through a series of lab "projects" which are undertaken as individuals and as a group. Zoology addresses similar skills through study of systems evolution.

Any course in the major field may be made <u>honors</u> if the student contracts with a professor who will direct special assignments, individual projects, or in-depth papers in lieu of some portion of the regular

assignments. The computer programming course may be elected for students with undefined majors and will function as a contract course. Thus, students who complete the honors program will have completed at least one course in which opportunities for one-on-one work with a professor is involved.

The committee feels that this program best fits the honors philosophy and the needs of this institution. As courses are added or deleted from the general education requirements, the program's built-in flexibility should allow honors to grow and change with the institution.

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